



Sermon Resource Materials

for
"A Christian Family Witness to Its Faith
Through Stewardship"

Library of Tim Servati
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of her brother-in-law and minister,
Charles Sumner

Family Messages on CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP

"The New Testament presents Christ as Lord of all life, and commissions every Christian to respond to this fact in the use of all his possessions. The Christian family that yields to the reign of Christ discovers great joy for itself and witnesses effectively to its faith."

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FOREWORD

Great churches have a way of developing strong Christian families, and strong Christian families contribute to the development of great churches. The need for both great churches and great families makes it imperative that every pastor be family conscious.

The six sermons in this book are designed to aid the pastor in his family-centered stewardship ministry. Each message fills a uniquely significant role in leading church families into a new Christian maturity in stewardship. The pastor can use these stewardship truths in challenging families to follow basic principles of money management, to relate their faith in Christ to all material possessions, and to honor Christ with the tithe.

When Christians truly respond to Christ as Lord, the result in the home is a genuine stability, purpose for living, and a quality of happiness not found anywhere else. A family faithful in its stewardship, witnesses to its faith through the support of its church, and the use of all its possessions.

"A CHRISTIAN FAMILY WITNESSING TO ITS FAITH THROUGH STEWARDSHIP" is the theme for the 1967 stewardship emphasis. This book is offered to assist pastors in preaching the truths and challenges contained in this theme.

- Cecil A. Ray

CHAPTER I

THE CHALLENGE OF A CHRISTIAN HOME

Scripture Text — Ephesians 5:22-23

The purpose of this message is to acknowledge the challenge that the Christian home has received from the world and to show how this challenge is met by the Christian home challenging the world.

George McDaniel Cole

THEME — "A Christian Family Witnessing to its Faith Through Stewardship."

Scheduled for Sunday I. (See calendar in 1967 Guidebook
—"A Christian Family Witnessing to its Faith
Through Stewardship.")

"The Challenge of a Christian Home" is an introduction to a family-centered stewardship emphasis. A dual purpose in the approach is to strengthen the Christian families and to challenge to a greater witness to their faith through stewardship.

Families are faced with many needs. If ever the pastor is to speak to the needs and seek to help these families, the time is now.

ORDER OF SERVICE

(Suggestion)

Distribute stewardship tract (or bulletin insert)

Recognize church's families

Testimony — ("What tithing has done for my home.")

Sermon — "The Challenge of a Christian Home"

THE CHALLENGE OF A CHRISTIAN HOME

Text — Ephesians 5:22-23

Before the dawn of the first morning, and before the light had shone in dark places to declare the glory of God on earth, the Lord God had design for man. When He had created the world, and all that is within, He climaxed this creation with the creation of man in His own image. When the Lord God looked out upon all that He had created, He said, "It is good!" And He said, again, "It is very good!" The first thing that God ever declared was not good was when He saw that man was alone.

"And the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him . . . and the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man made he a woman, and brought her unto man. And Adam said, this is now, bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh." (Gen. 2:18-24)

It has been suggested that God took the rib from man's side to create a companion to walk beside him, from beneath his arm, to be sheltered and protected, and from a place close to his heart to be loved.

In the beauty of Eden's Garden, God Himself performed the first Marriage Ceremony. Here, God gave man His first Divine Institution. From that moment forward God has honored the home as His Divine Institution in this world. Our blessed Lord Jesus came into this world to be a part of a home. He was an obedient Son. (Lk. 2:51)

Our Lord Jesus was a partner with His foster father, Joseph, in the carpenter's shop. He was kind and considerate of His mother, Mary. His first miracle was at a wedding feast in Cana. (John 2:1-11) He blessed the home of Simon Peter when He healed Simon's wife's mother. He blessed the home of Jairus when He raised the good man's daughter from death. He made the heart of a widow glad when he restored her son to life in Nain. He wept in Bethany before raising his good friend Lazarus from the dead. Our Lord Jesus used terminology of an eternal "Home" and of "Our Father." He gave us the parable of the prodigal son. Jesus spoke very meaningful and important words about the home. He spoke of God's divine purpose for the home in Matthew's Gospel. He reminded children of their responsibility to parents. (Matthew 15:4ff) He gave strong emphasis to monogamy. (Matthew 5:31-32) Jesus was truly, woman's best friend. Our Lord Jesus speaks of Himself as "the Bridegroom" and His church, "His Bride."

The home is the first Divine Institution, and the first institution of society. It is very, very true, "That as the home goes, so goes the nation . . ."

I. THE CHRISTIAN HOME IS CHALLENGED TO CHANGE, BY OUR CHANGING NATION.

The challenge to change is inescapable. Every home has one or more radios. Nearly every home has one or more television sets. These two media have contributed more than anything else to a changing society. Television is here to stay, and could well be one of the most influential factors in communication in the history of the world. Not all of the influence is bad, and not all is good.

Some weeks ago a very fine Christian woman, came to her pastor, deeply disturbed. "I just know my husband is running around on me," she assured her pastor. Knowing that the husband was a splendid Christian gentleman,

and having considerable doubt that this was true, the pastor asked, "Why do you think this?" The reply was immediate: "On a T.V. show that I watch every afternoon there is a man who is running around on his wife, and he acts just like my husband . . ." This home was salvaged but could well have been dissolved through the influence of a day-time serial.

The influence of literature is likewise great. With a new sense of freedom in the publication of literature that appeals to the basest nature of mankind, pornographic literature is available everywhere. Tragically, many Christian people are purchasing such literature and consume it with eagerness. All that one reads and sees becomes a part of that one. The end result of reading filthy literature is a filthy mind.

A fine looking couple were visited by a local pastor. They were both college graduates, and had the culture and charm to be admired in young life that faced the future unafraid. The husband spoke lightly of the church, though he and his wife were both Baptists. He insisted that they were more "modern" in their attitudes toward religion and society . . . whatever that means. Not many days later, the husband called the pastor for a conference. When he came into the pastor's study he had the appearance of one in great anguish. "I'm in trouble," were his first words. "What is the matter? Perhaps I can help you," replied the pastor. "Well, my wife thinks I've been running around on her." "Have you?" inquired the pastor. "Yes," was the answer. "Does your wife know that you have been unfaithful?" inquired the pastor. "Yes, as a matter of fact she caught me with another woman at 3:00 in the morning when I had told her I'd be out of town on business. Preacher, my wife is sure mad at me . . ." "I suppose that most wives would be a bit upset about that," replied the pastor. "Preacher, when we married we decided to be 'modern' and not let morals

or the church interfere with our 'happiness' . . . it just doesn't work!" Then the man, strong in body, broke down and cried as a little child. The home was salvaged, but only after husband and wife returned to the teachings of a Christian home.

The challenge to "conform" and to "change with the times" is ever before progressive young people. The "new image" may not be all bad, but when there is a compromise with basic Christian faith and practise it is not at all good.

The challenge of the "new morality" appeals to the very basic instinct of mankind. If there is to be victory over the temptation of the flesh, there must be a strong foundation, anchored to Christ Jesus the Lord.

Change has already transpired. The size of the family has changed. From large families in the early decades of this century, the size of the family dropped considerably during the 1930's, and 1940's. After the war the size of the family showed an increase. There seems to be a stabilized family size with notable exception in our day. The exception to the rule is that those who can least afford to do so financially are having the most children. There are many contributing factors to this trend, but the fact of the trend is inescapable.

Along with a change in size has come a change in type of family. The day of the patriarch is almost forgotten. The rise of woman in the home was the first step in this change. The rise of the child in the home brought it altogether.

Hal Boyle, in his syndicated column, wrote an interesting article entitled, "WOMEN NOT CONTENT TO RULE BY ROCKING THE CRADLE." He very astutely points out that women have invaded every phase

of the business world, and in many instances make more salary than their husbands. He concludes:

"The best bet for an ambitious young man who wants a quiet indoor existence is to — get a job as a maid. In addition to good pay, good meals and short hours it has another advantage: It is a wonderful training for a lad who later wants to get married and have a home."

One man, when hearing of the change in type of homelife replied: "I've learned how to handle my wife. I just find out what she wants to do, then I make her do it."

The change in homelife is also seen in the changing function of the home. Formerly most of the family needs were met at home by the family. Today, many of the basic needs are bequeathed to institutions. The recreational needs, companionship, responsibility, and other needs are now relegated to churches, schools, and clubs.

The many changes have resulted in a change in the stability of the home. The rising rate of divorce is alarming. The resulting rate of crime, tragedy and broken lives is appalling. To the most casual observer it is quite obvious that all the changes have not been for the best.

The changes have come from many sources. The transition of family life from rural environment to the urban life of a city has been one of the primary factors in change. The mobile population, without deep roots in any community has contributed greatly. The "workload" has been lifted by science, from both men and women. There is consequently more free time which is not always used to the best advantage of the family. Inflated economy and easy credit have contributed greatly to the change in the home. Planned parenthood, and longer life expectancy have created new liberties and new problems.

The results of the changes are both good and bad. It is good that marriage is more voluntary and that the permanence of the home is due more to the inner impulses than the outer forces. It is good that the rights of women and children are more respected. It is bad that these changes have brought more divorce, more broken hearts, more crime and tragedy and more sorrow. It is bad that the lack of discipline and of the family unit responsibilities has fostered juvenile delinquency and youth crime. The home is robbed of a worthy purpose for existence and the entire fabric of society is weakened.

II. THE CHANGELESS NATURE OF A CHRISTIAN HOME CHALLENGES A CHANGING SOCIETY.

The Lord, God, has a changeless plan for the home. God's plan is reaveled in His Holy Word. The Lord God created man, and created woman to be man's companion, helper, and mate. Throughout the Old Testament the husband and father of the home was the patriarch and ruler. In the New Testament the instruction is given in Ephensians 5:22-25, for "... wives to submit themselves to their husbands as unto the Lord," and for the "husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church." Concerning the children, the Word of God is also clear. Col. 3:20 "Children, obey your parents in all things for this is pleasing to the Lord." There is no room for argument about the Divine plan of God for the home. The instructions are as plain on this subject as they are regarding salvation. This is a changeless element of the family that challenges society.

There is a changeless nature in man and woman which challenges a changing society. God created man and woman for each other. He intended that the home be a refuge, a haven, a place of joy and delight for each member of the family. Man and woman have a changeless need for each other. There are basic biological, emotional,

and social needs that each mate has which can be met only in the other.

Children have a changeless need for many things in the home. There is a need for discipline and love. The two are inseparable.

There was once a family with an only child. The parents of the child were lovely people, both well educated and very religious. The child was, to put it mildly, "spoiled beyond description." When speaking to the pastor, the mother said, "We just love her too much to punish her . . . we just never have been able to discipline her at all." The child then eight years of age, had the appearance of a five year old. She was thin, and sickly. Her teeth were rotted beyond description. She was in the doctor's office every week. The parents never insisted on a good meal nor a balanced diet. If the child wanted candy at noon, just before lunch, she had candy. Actually, in an effort to be kind to the child, the parents were most cruel. They had a concept of love which was a sentimentality resulting in a child with an emaciated body, early in life.

Visiting in a home with a father who had played football in college, we were interrupted by a four old boy who came in and banged away on the piano. The father said, "Son, don't do that." "Shut up!" replied the son, and banged away. The mother came in, moved the lad from the piano, and closed the piano. The young lad of four years, took his mother's arm, and bit it until blood came. The father sat in his chair, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "We just can't do a thing with him . . ."

I did not understand that. The father had the reach on the son, outweighed him, and had every other advantage. I could have done something with him! They were raising a child who would never respect authority. A child needs discipline and love. The two are inseparable.

A child needs two parents . . . a father and a mother. There is a need for companionship and for sharing. There is a basic need for shared responsibilities. There is a basic need for contributing to the family unit as well as receiving from the family as a part of the group.

For many years, in every revival, I have preached a sermon on the home. This has been, without exception, the most appreciated message of the week. For the most part, the response has been tremendous. There was one occasion when a little lady came down the aisle after church and said very curtly: "Well, I sure am glad I didn't marry you!" I replied, "Lady, you're not any happier about that than I am."

The home has another changeless need, in our changing world. The home needs Jesus. Each individual in the home, needs Jesus as a personal Savior and Lord. Each one must come to realize that sin separates the soul from God. Each one must repent individually and personally and accept the gift of God's Son as one's own personal salvation.

The home needs the church. There is a need for the family to be united in the same church. After many years I have come to what I consider to be the only fair approach to a divided family. If the husband is a Baptist, and the wife a member of a church of some other de-

nomination, since the Bible speaks of the husband as the head of the home, she by all means should join the Baptist church with her husband. To be perfectly fair, if the wife is a Baptist, the husband should by all means, love her enough, to join her church with her. Of course if neither of the mates is Baptist, they should both compromise and join the Baptist church. This, seems to me, to be the best solution to this problem.

The home needs family worship. There is a need for prayer at meal time. There is a need for family prayer together. The home needs to read God's Word together. The father should take the initative to lead in family worship. One of the greatest needs of any home is that the family tithe their income. There have likely been some, but I have not counseled with any family that has come to a divorce where the family worshipped together and tithed their income. Children should be led to share in their worship of God, in every way.

Conclusion:

Illustration: A mother felt a little hand tugging at her apron. She looked down into the big blue eyes of her baby daughter. The family had just returned from church, and the mother was preparing the noon meal.

"Mother," spake the little girl, "when I die, will I be old, or will I be little like I am now?" The mother thought little about the question, and replied, "Oh, I suppose you will be very old. Most people grow old before they die."

"Then Mother, I just think I would like to die right now!" said the little girl.

Mother stopped what she was doing, lifted the child upon the cabinet in the kitchen, looked into her sweet, innocent eyes, and said, "Sweetheart, what on earth makes you say a thing like that?"

Without hesitation came the simple reply: "Mother, I just think it would be wonderful to grow up where Jesus is . . ."

This is the challenge of the Christian home . . . that our children grow up where Jesus is in our midst.

CHAPTER II

THE MEANING OF COMMITMENT

Scripture Text — Matthew 16:24-25

Christ calls everyone everywhere to come after him upon one qualification - - - that of total commitment, which is the total submission of the individual to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

- Jack R. Taylor

Theme — "A Christian Family Witnessing to its Faith Through Stewardship."

Scheduled for Sunday II — (See calendar in 1967 Guidebook — "A Christian Family Witnessing to its Faith Through Stewardship")

"The Meaning of Commitment" is designed to lead members to see what is involved in their acceptance of Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Understanding this relationship is essential to stewardship development.

ORDER OF SERVICE

(Suggestion)

The regular order of service may be followed with selection of songs from among the following:

"The Master Hath Come and Calls Us To Follow"

"I Surrender All"

"I'll Go Where You Want Me To Go"

"Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken"

Suggested Invitation Hymn:

"Take My Life and Let It Be"

Suggestions for Invitation:

- 1. Have a time of prayer and meditation before the invitation. (Remain seated)
- 2. Ask those whose commitment should involve some public decision to come forward. (Move of letters, professions of faith, acceptance of God's call for service, confession of sin and rededication, etc.)
- 3. Finally ask those who are still seated to seriously consider this matter of commitment. Some will have already made such a commitment. Encourage them to stand. Then challenge others who have never come to that blessed moment in their lives to take their stand for Christ right then.
- 4. As those stand making commitments the choir may wish to sing victoriously, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back."
- 5. A prayer of dedication should follow.

THE MEANING OF COMMITMENT

Text: Matthew 16:24-25

Everywhere Christ went he invited people to come after Him. The work of His disciples was to make other disciples. But nowhere did He call men to come after Him on their own terms. In fact, so stringent were his qualifications that many who at first followed Him turned away and followed Him no more. He allowed them to go, His silence a testimony that if He could not have the whole of a man's loyalty He would never compromise with him on lower terms. HE CALLED FOR COMMITMENT WHICH WAS TOTAL. In our text which is found in all the synoptics, Jesus makes clear the terms of discipleship. The words, "If any man come after me" are followed by a clear-cut qualification of total commitment. The words to follow in his statement contain three well-defined facets of the committed life.

Before we go into our text it might be well to say that commitment is the word for this hour. All over the world men and women of all ages are committing themselves to causes, to issues, to revolutions of all kinds. Any cause which hopes to triumph against great odds calls for the commitment of its constituency. COMMITMENT IS THE WORD FOR THIS HOUR IN THE CHURCH OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. The problems of the church today have a common source and thus a common solution. These problems are brought about by a lack of commitment on the part of the leadership as well as the laity. THESE PROBLEMS WOULD BE SOLVED BY A TOTAL COMMITMENT ON THE PART OF BOTH.

Today striking laborers are committed to the improving of conditions for the working man. Demonstrating civilrights workers are committed to the bringing about of what they believe to be equal rights for every race.

Rampaging communism is enlisting devotees who are committed to the conquering of the world for communism. This commitment is reflected in the words of one young communist:

"We communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose to life. We subordinate our petty, personal selves into a great movement of humanity, and if our personal lives seem hard or our egos seem to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us in a small way is helping to bring something new, and true, and better to mankind. There is one thing about which I am dead earnest, and that is the communist cause. It is my life, my business, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife and mistress, my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream about it at night. I have already been in jail because of my ideas, and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad."

If communists can be as dedicated and committed as this for their cause, how much more should Christians commit themselves to Christ.

But let us look into the meaning of commitment through the words of Jesus. Christian commitment is not mad fanaticism centered upon a set of ideas or a cause. It is the personal submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is not the determination to just pattern our lives after our great Leader, but to submit ourselves to this Leader who still lives and allow Him to do His work through us.

JESUS MAKES CLEAR THE MEANING AND INVOLVEMENT OF COMMITMENT IN OUR TEXT . . . "IF ANY MAN WOULD COME AFTER ME . . ."

I. COMMITMENT INITIATES IN ABANDONMENT (. . . let him deny himself.) Every Christian who has

ever been used of God effectively has known the meaning of the experience of abandonment. L. E. Maxwell uses this concept as the subject for his classic book, ABANDONED TO CHRIST.

Abandonment may be defined as that experience in which the whole of the self life is reckoned no longer alive, but dead with Christ and thus the pursuits of self with all its ideas, opinions, affections and aspirations are forever adandoned. WHEN WE SET OUR FACES TO FOLLOW CHRIST, THIS WILL BE OUR EXPERIENCE...

- 1. It is an abandonment based on scriptural principles.
 - Romans 6:5 "Know ye not that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death."
 - Romans 6:11 "Reckon yourselves therefore to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."
 - Colossians 3:3 "For ye are dead and your life is hid with God in Christ."

At the heart of scriptural teaching regarding the union of the believer with Christ is the repeated fact of our coming to the end of ourselves so that He might live in power within us. This is what Paul had in mind when in II Corinthians 4:10 he said, "Always bearing about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus Christ might be manifest in our body." IT WAS ABANDONMENT WHICH BROUGHT US TO CHRIST IN THE FIRST PLACE AND IT IS CONTINUOUS ABANDOMENT WHICH ENGAGES AND MAINTAINS THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST IN OUR LIVES.

2. It is abandonment *from* the self life to Christ life. Denial, basically, is the selling out of the whole of self to Christ . . . the abandonment of all to Christ . . . This was Paul's spirit in Philippians 3 when he said, "I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

John Mott had experienced this abandonment in his life. When offered the ambassadorship to a foreign country by president Coolidge, he replied, "Mr. President, when God called me to be a missionary, my ears became deaf to every other call." (TRUE DISCIPLESHIP by William McDonald p. 46).

C. T. Studd had experienced this abandonment when he gave up all his wealth and followed Christ to the mission field. He penned these words which reflected that abandonment:

"Some want to live within the sound
Of church or chapel bell.

I want to run a rescue shop
Within a yard of hell." (McDonald p. 26)

A young woman who had committed her life to China as a missionary knew the experience of abandonment and reflected it when a friend asked her "How can you die in the filth of a foreign country?" She replied, "When God called me to China and I accepted that call, I DIED to everything but God and China."

Have you known this first facet of the committed life? Have you experienced the blessed release which comes when you turn from self to Christ . . . COMPLETELY . . . from all the pursuits which characterize the earthly life to those which are eternal in Christ? COMMITMENT INITIATES IN ABANDONMENT.

II. COMMITMENT CONTINUES IN IDENTIFICATION (. . . and take up his cross . . .) The cross, when spoken of in the scripture, usually refers to the whole plan of God in affecting human redemption. It was the death of Christ which wrought our salvation. We are commanded to "take up" the cross, that is, identify with Christ in the cause of redemption. We must identify with His death before we can identify with His life. We become one with Him in vital life, when we reckon ourselves as having died with Him. TO TAKE UP THE CROSS IS TO TAKE UP THE CHRIST LIFE . . . A WAY OF SACRIFICE AND SELF GIVING.

Christ called men to identify with Him. In John 6 he called himself the BREAD OF LIFE and asked that men eat of the bread. (Identify with Him.) In the observance of the Lord's Supper we PARTAKE of the elements of the Supper, thus the symbol of identification. TO TAKE HIS CROSS MEANS TO TOTALLY IDENTIFY WITH HIM.

- 1. It is an exclusive identification. Having identified with Christ, all that is contrary to Him must go. It is not a matter of deciding what is right and wrong socially, morally, and legally as much as it is a matter of deciding what is and what is not in accord with the Lord Jesus Christ with whom we have become totally identified.
- 2. It is an *inclusive* identification. If there is one facet of the Christ life which is foreign to our tastes and thus refused the commitment is not total. To identify with Christ means to accept His life totally inclusive of all that He is and all that he advocates.
- 3. It is an *irrevocable* identification. There is a finality about true identification. There is no turning back. We are on a mission for Christ from which there

is no return. Like the suicide pilots of Japan in World War II, we are irrevocably committed. (Total Commitment by A. W. Tozer p. 12).

Preacher Charles Howard was being shown through a factory which produced the famed PT Boats of World War II which proved to be such strategic and deadly weapons against the Japanese fleet. Upon observing the manner in which they were built mainly out of plywood, he remarked, "Why, man, these boats will never come back." The executive who himself had a boy on one of those boats somewhere in the Pacific theatre replied with tears in his eyes, "Preacher, we don't make them to come back . . . WE MAKE THEM TO GO!" They had a mission which required irrevocable commitment. (From a sermon by Charles Howard).

We have a song we sing . . . I have decided to follow Jesus, No turning back, no turning back.

TRUE COMMITMENT CONTINUES IN IDENTIFICATION.

III. COMMITMENT CLIMAXES IN SERVICE (. . . and follow me.)

Christ has come to serve. Through the power of God he ministers to the needs of the world. He said, "As the Father hath sent me, So send I you." A life of following Christ will be a life of service. This is a present tense verb as are the others, "deny" and "take up" remarking of a constancy in "followship." Thus this service is . . .

- 1. A service which is *continuous*. We never gain the liberty to return to our own interests. There are never any holidays from serving Christ.
- 2. A service which is *selfless*. It is easy to do things for God and others out of hope for reward or success for the glory of self. Genuine service which comes from within a context of commitment is SELFLESS.

- As Paul said in Acts 20:24 "Neither count I my life dear unto myself." So it is to be with us.
- 3. A service which is *productive*. Unlike the service which is in the flesh . . . spiritual service which follows commitment produces good works. Ephesians 2:10 "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, unto GOOD WORKS."

If we are the servants of God then a servant exists for service. We have given ourselves to God to be used as He wills. We are no longer our own. The central fact of our existence is service with Christ. It is normal result of commitment.

CONCLUSION:

Thus the meaning of commitment is bound up in these three words . . . ABANDONMENT, IDENTIFICATION, AND SERVICE. Life after life in history bears these qualities as did the life of Paul. These words readily come to mind as we hear Paul say, "I am crucified with Christ . . . nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me and the life I now live in the flesh . . . I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

An old man spoke of being crucified with Christ. A young man asked him about the meaning of being crucified with Christ. The old man replied, "Well, it means three things: First, the man who is crucified is facing only one direction. He is a man of one concentrated purpose in life. Nailed to the cross he is a man of one direction. Secondly, the man who is crucified is not going back. And thirdly, the man on the cross has no further plans of his own. SUCH IS THE MAN WHO IS COMMITTED TO CHRIST. (TOTAL COMMITMENT, A. W. Tozer p. 12-13)

Commitment was the mainspring of the early church and is the hope for renewal in the Church today. The world was not moved by men partially or casually committed, but by men who were sold out to the Saviour.

A life of partial commitment is a life of insecurity, doubt, frustration, and confusion. A life of commitment is one out of which flows genuine spiritual service and rivers of joy.

James S. Stewart has well said, "If we could but show the world that being committed to Christ is no tame, humdrum, sheltered monotony, but indeed the greatest adventure the human spirit can ever know, those standing on the outside of the church looking askance at Christ would come crowding in to pay allegiance and we could well expect the greatest revival since Pentacost. (From a sermon by Bill Bright of Campus Crusade) I BELIEVE IT! Will you now say . . . I WILL GIVE MYSELF TO CHRIST. Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee. The Methodists of past generations emphasized the Covenant of Consecration:

"Lord, I am no longer mine but thine. Put me to what thou wilt; Rank me with whom thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be employed by thee or laid aside by thee, exalted for thee, or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I FREELY AND HEARTILY YIELD ALL THINGS TO THY PLEASURE AND DISPOSAL." (ABANDONED TO CHRIST, L. E. Maxwell p. 16)

Let this invitation to commitment be seriously accepted here and a new day will come in the life of this church and in your individual life. This is our hope for renewal. It is your decision. What will you do?

CHAPTER III

KEEPING OUR VOWS VITAL

Scripture Text — Matthew 19:3-6

The purpose of this sermon is to lead the Christian into a deeper knowledge and experience of Christian stewardship through seeing the continuous aspects of the marriage and salvation vows.

- Presnall H. Wood

Theme — "A Christian Family Witnessing to its Faith Through Stewardship."

Scheduled for Sunday II - Night Service

Promote attendance for this service by assigning each family a pew. Enlist one faithful family to be responsible for two other families who are assigned to the same pew. Ask families to sit together.

ORDER OF SERVICE KEEPING OUR VOWS VITAL

Prelude Traditional Processional Wedding March
Ushering Families Seated Together in Prearranged Pews
Hymn "God Give Us Christian Homes"
Prayer
Purpose and AnnouncementsPastor
Presentation of Filmstrip"I Do, Lord"
Hymn"I Love Thee"
Offertory Prayer Layman
Offertory"O Perfect Love"
Soloist "Saviour, Like A Shepherd Lead Me"
Sermon "Keeping Our Vows Vital"
Dedication (People Standing — Bowed Heads) Pastor

Marriage Vow:

In taking the one whom you hold by the hand to be your lawful and wedded wife, I require you to promise to love and cherish her, to honor and sustain her, in sickness as in health, in poverty as in wealth, in the bad that may darken your days, in the good that may light your ways, and to be true to your companion in all things until death shall part you.

Stewardship Vow:

In taking Jesus Christ as your saviour and Lord, I require you to promise to love and crown Him, to honor and hold Him, in your sickness as in your health, in your poverty as in your wealth, in the bad that may darken your days, in the good that may

light your ways, and to be true to Jesus as a faithful steward in all things until death alone shall part you.

Prayer of Dedication

Invitation "Take My Life, and Let It Be"
(Sing the words, "Take My Home and Let it Be, Consecrated, Lord to Thee; Lord, I give my home to thee)

The invitation should be for the definite dedication of homes publicly to Christ.

Benediction

Congregation Sing in Unison Malotte's "Lord's Prayer"

KEEPING OUR VOWS VITAL

Text — Matthew 19:3-6

When William Jennings Bryan was well along in years, he posed for a portrait. The artist asked him, "Mr. Bryan, why do you wear your hair so long?" Bryan replied, "When I was courting Mrs. Bryan, she objected to the way my ears stood out, and to please her I let my hair grow to cover them." The artist countered, "But Mr. Bryan that was many years ago; don't you think you should have your hair cut now?" Bryan replied with genuine astonishment, "But sir, the romance is still going on!"

And so it should!

For true love requires that the vows be kept vital.

This is true in every area of life, but it is especially true in life's two great loves. These loves would consist of that found in marriage and salvation.

The vows of love in marriage should be kept vital. Marriage is more than a ceremony. It is a continuing relationship. Marriage is more than a beautiful moment surrounded by flowers, friends, and flashbulbs. It is a love that lasts. Marriage is more than the feeble mumbling of the traditional words "I do." It is coming to say "I will" and eventually to look back across the years and say with a sense of pride "I have." For this to happen the vows of love must be kept vital.

Not only is this true of marriage vows, but also of salvation vows. For our marriage vows are strikingly similar to the vows made to Jesus in salvation. This should not surprise us, because throughout the Bible the marriage relationship between a man and woman finds its highest analogy in the relation between a man and God. In the Old Testament Israel is thought of as a bride. In the

New Testament men are urged to love their wives as Christ loved the church.

Thus salvation is more than a moment, but it is the stewardship of a life. It is recognizing that that which makes a person a Christian steward dates back to the hour when a person said "I do, Lord." Christian stewardship is not divorced from, but an integral part of the salvation experience.

Whether it is saying "I do" as a bride or groom, or saying "I do" as a penitent sinner before God, the vows must be kept vital.

There were those in the day of Jesus that had difficulty in keeping the vows of love vital. Their feelings were represented in a group of Pharisees who came to Jesus in the coasts of Judea beyond Jordon. These Pharisees put a test question to Jesus in asking, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" Jesus answered with keen wisdom, "Have you not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and, for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." (Matthew 19:3-6)

Within this introduction of Jesus' discussion of divorce can be found the way in which we can keep our vows of love vital. In this unsuspecting place we can find a window through which we see the heart of Christian stewardship. May we with all honesty apply these truths to our lives.

- I. TO KEEP OUR VOWS VITAL THERE IS A PROBLEM THAT MUST BE RECOGNIZED (vs. 3)
 - 1. Recognize a problem of asking questions that have already been answered. "The Pharisee came unto

him, tempting him, and saying . . ." In an attempt to back Jesus into a corner the Pharisees asked a question containing social dynamite. Their motives were not pure, because they already knew the answer to the question asked. It was a tempting question seeking compromise.

Our vows of love in the home will be kept vital when we recognize that this is a problem that we face. Far too many times marriages have been brought to ruin in an attempt to find some other answer than the right answer.

There is a problem in Christian stewardship that arises from an effort to ask questions that have already been answered. These questions come from our attempt to find a short-cut and compromise. We ask, "Should our family pay our bills before we pay our tithe?" We ask, "Should our family care for our relatives before we give the first part to God?" With ceaseless flow the sentimental questions are asked, but in our hearts we know that these questions have already been answered. These questions were answered at the time of our salvation. We must recognize this problem if we are to keep our vows vital.

2. Recognize a problem of being more concerned about law than love.

The Pharisees came to Jesus steeped in a background of legalism. It was natural for them to ask, "... is it lawful ...?" They were concerned about the rules of law but not the way of love. This was a problem in keeping their vows vital.

The problem exists in many homes producing looming barriers in the marriage because the parties involved are interested in only what is lawful.

Families facing up to their witness in stewardship

contend with the question, "Is it lawful?" What we really are saying to Jesus is, "Do I have to?" We ask, "Can our family get by without being good stewards?" To keep our vows vital we must recognize the problem of searching for the loopholes of the law instead of going the way of love and doing what God would desire.

3. Recognize a problem of broken vows for every cause.

". . . Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"

The Pharisees were admitting the guilt of following after the custom of the day in breaking the marriage for any cause. The laxity of their lives presented a problem to their hearts.

Prior to our casting the first stones at the first century Pharisees, it would be well for us to see how many marriages today fall under the gavel of the divorce court for "every cause." The "every cause" of today is draped in the first phrases of "incompatibility" and "mental cruelty."

How is it in our lives with our vows of love to the Lord? It appears that we "put away" our vows of love toward God for any and every cause. The witness of a family in the area of stewardship means that the family buying is not at the expense of putting away God. God comes with his claim, and the tragedy of trivialities rob God every day of His possessions.

William L. Sperry wrote a book entitled *Jesus, Then and Now.* A woman ordered it in a store, giving the title *Jesus, Now and Then.* (p. 235, Halford Luccock, *More Preaching Values in Epistles of Paul.*) That has been too often the trouble. It has been a case of "Jesus, Now and Then." The problem of vetoed vows must be recognized if we are to keep our vows vital.

II. TO KEEP OUR VOWS VITAL THERE IS A PURPOSE THAT MUST BE REVIEWED (vs. 4)

1. Review purpose in the light of mistaken concepts.

The Pharisees boasted of their acquaintance with the law, but Jesus reproached them because of their ignorance. Jesus asked them, "Have you not read Genesis 1:27?" The Pharisees had read it many times, but they needed a review. They had some mistaken concepts.

Fresh marriage vows require constant review. A refresher course in the meaning of marriage would save many marriages. There are too many hazy concepts that collect in the mind of the individual.

The purpose of our salvation needs to be reviewed. It is possible to lose reality as to what took place when an individual was saved. Many of the mistaken concepts of Christian stewardship would be solved by reviewing the very meaning of salvation.

2. Review purpose in the light of original intent. Jesus asked the Pharisees to review the original blueprint for marriage. "He which made them at the beginning" needed to serve as a measuring rod for their actions. Jesus went back of the law and the interpreter of the law to God the lawgiver and to the original purpose for the relationship of husband and wife. This was needed for the vows of love to be kept vital.

There are few couples that stand to say their wedding vows without having the sincere intention that this is love for life. But the mixture of confusion causes many of the vows to become stale. The intention is completely forgotton.

When a person becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ, there is the intention of God for every person to become a steward. Some Christians appear offended when the claims of Christ are presented to them. They act as if this was the fine print of salvation that they failed to read. The asking of a family to tithe should not be considered as a surprise. God does not just spring his lordship over our lives in the area of our possessions. But God says, "Review, that from the beginning I intended this blessing to be for all!"

A good understanding goes a long way, and a good review helps to keep that understanding clear.

3. Review purpose in the light of common need.

"Made them male and female" speaks of common need. God saw that it was not good for man to be alone. Therefore, God created for man a companion in which true need was felt for each other. In the creative act, in which God instituted marriage, a common need was known. The man needs the woman, and the woman needs the man.

The vows of love are kept vital in marriage when this purpose is constantly reviewed. Independence will give way to dependence in this relationship.

In the area of stewardship it is not good for man to be alone. Man must remember that God needs him as well as he needs God. It is coming to appreciate the fact that God has placed His faith in man. Rather than having the sureness of a puppet or a robot without freedom, God gambled on man. God believed that His children would love Him to the point that as He met their needs, then His people would meet His needs. Do not forget this aspect in reviewing the purpose of the vows made to God.

Shopenhauer, the philosopher, was once found by a policeman late at night in a London park sitting on a bench with his face buried in his hands. The policeman said, "What are you doing here?" The philosopher answered, "Sir, I wish I knew!"

We must continue to review the purpose of marriage and stewardship in order that we might find out what we are doing here in between the cradle and the grave. This helps to keep our vows vital.

III. TO KEEP OUR VOWS VITAL THERE IS A PREFERENCE THAT MUST BE REQUIRED (vs. 5a)

1. Requires a preference that involves priority.

Jesus strikes at the heart of primacy when he said, "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother." The love of a man for his wife should be above any other type of human love. The marital love stands above parental love. Here is found an imperious demand for priority. For the vows of love in marriage to be kept vital there is the preference of priority required.

This was the need of Israel. The divine principle of marriage is used again and again in the Bible concerning the relationship of God and His people. On more than one occasion Israel was accused of spiritual adultery. Their unfaithfulness had resulted from failing to have a sense of priority to God.

As families face up to their witness through stewardship there is a need for priority. In our homes there must be "leaving" in order that there can be some "giving." We must "leave" the clutch of materialism in order that we might "give" to the claim of missions.

To publicize a new history book the publishers, Grosset and Dunlap, asked a panel of 28 historians, educators, and journalists to rate the 100 most significant events in history. First place: Columbus' discovery of America. Second, Gutenberg's development of movable type. Eleven events tied for

third place. Tied with four other events in fourth place was that Jesus Christ was crucified. (p. 223, Halford Luccock — More Preaching values in the Epistles of Paul)

Think of it! Jesus tied for fourth place! How does Jesus rate in our homes? Do we budget our money that after all of pleasure, luxuries, and entertainment is over, Jesus is paid? Does He even tie for fourth place in many of our homes? To keep our vows vital the commanding priority of Jesus Christ must be obeyed and Jesus must be in first place.

2. Requires a preference that involves loyalty.

The loyalty is such that a man shall "... cleave to his wife ..." This is a loyalty without any reservations. It is an unquestionable loyalty.

Our vows of love to God are kept vital when we make a daily preference of loyalty to Christ rather than succumbing to temptations. The seeds of disloyalty to Christ in our lives can often date to the time when we failed to make the preference.

When Benjamin Disraeli, the Prime Minister of England, was old and ill, he wrote to his wife, Mary Anne, saying, "a hospital with you is worth a palace with anyone else." (p. 87, George E. Sweazy, In Holy Marriage)

This consuming loyalty is what is required to be able to keep the vows vital.

IV. TO KEEP OUR VOWS VITAL THERE IS A ONENESS THAT MUST RESULT (vs. 5b-6a)

1. Results in a oneness of attitude.

Jesus states that the result is that "... they twain shall be one flesh..." The reference of Jesus is primarily to the physical fleshly unity, but the ideal unity of marriage covers the whole nature of man.

It is a oneness in all attitudes. It penetrates sympathy, interest, and concern. This singleness of love takes on the characteristic of the spiritual.

The Frenchman, Antoine de St.-Exupery, wrote of the wife whom he loved dearly, "Life has taught us that love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking outward together in the same direction." (p. 60, George E. Sweazey, *In Holy Marriage*)

To keep our vows of love vital to God there must be a oneness in attitude. We come to not only just look at Jesus with a sentimental feeling, but we come to see the world as Jesus sees it. We come to look outward together in the same direction with Jesus. When a family gains the attitude of looking where Jesus looks, the touch of transformation takes place in all plans. The tithe of the family becomes the bare minimum. A oneness of attitude with Christ results. Vows are not as difficult to keep vital when we are "in Christ."

2. Results in oneness of action.

When the miracle of marriage takes place, Jesus says, "they are no more twain, but one flesh." Phillips translates, "So they are no longer two separate people but one." In this manner Jesus was pointing to marriage as the institution that the Creator ordained so that the miracle of creation might continue. James Phillips writes, "Two literally become one in an infinitely precious bundle of new life. This is the highest fulfillment of two people in love." (p. 53, John Wynn, Sermons on Marriage and Family Life)

When the vows of love toward God are kept vital, there is a result of creation. The analogy of love toward God tells us that when we place ourselves and our possessions in the hands of God a miracle is produced out of this oneness. This oneness with God results in the creation of new churches, sending missionaries, building buildings, and winning the lost to Christ.

"When love is built on these ideals, it produces the kind of "one flesh" that held Hans and Gertrude Hornbastel together as they stood in the isolation ward of a San Francisco Hospital. Gertrude had contracted leprosy. Major Hornbastel was a veteran of two wars and the Bataan "death march." He did not have leprosy, but he was making arrangements to enter the leprosarium also, that he and his wife might end their days on earth together." (p. 18, Wayne Dehoney, *Homemade Happiness*)

Does not this shoot straight for our hearts with the question, "Am I in a spirit and action of oneness with Jesus Christ?" Our vows must be kept vital.

V. TO KEEP OUR VOWS VITAL THERE IS A SEPARATION THAT MUST BE REFUSED (vs. 6b)

1. Refuse to separate because of God being involved. It is "what God joined . . ." The entrance into a contract of marriage must recognize God. It is not enough to consider "His" and "Hers." There must be imprinted "God's" on everything of the family. The vertical vows must be recognized.

Families will refuse to separate themselves from God because they realize that God is involved not only in joining power but also in keeping power. Such a follow through will lead us not only piously to say, "What God hath joined" but also "What God hath kept."

One describes it in saying, "A married couple is like dancers on a tightrope. They can all expect to

have at least one fall, and some break their necks. But husbands and wives who have faith fall into the net that has been spread out to catch them—the grace of God. There they roll into each other's arms, and then climb back up onto the tightrope again." (p. 72, George Sweazey, *In Holy Marriage*)

We must refuse to separate the family from God's will.

2. Refuse to separate because of the individuals being involved.

The solemn phrase "what God hath joined together" was not given for preachers to have something to say at a wedding ceremony. It was given by Christ to tell us that the union involved in marriage is not terminable. It is for life. It is not "till debts do us part" but "death do us part." It is not "till differences do us part" but "till death do us part." It is a pledge for life. But it is not a pledge of misery. Sweazey says, "The marriage vow is a life promise, not a life sentence." (p. 101, George E. Sweazey, In Holy Marriage)

May every Christian married couple realize that the pledge to Jesus of love is just as indissoluble as the marriage vows. There must be a refusal to separate the family from the claims of Christ. There must not be a divorce from Jesus' desire to have every family a stewardship family. The family must not separate Christ from our goods and gifts.

3. Refuse to separate because of the community being involved.

The stern warning of "let no man put asunder" tells of the community being involved in the family relationship. The implication is that any man who divides what God has by his own creation united, must face God and His will. "Marriage is more than

a private affair. The community has a stake in marriage." (p. 65, John Wynn, Sermons on Marriage and Family Life)

Families must refuse to separate themselves from God's claim on their possessions. Our world cannot stand this type of separation. The need is too great. The situation of the world does not even permit a trial separation of our goods from Jesus. No family can say with indifference, "Let the rest of the world go by." History is made in the home. Evangelism is born in the home. Missions depend upon the home. The kingdom of God depends upon the family witnessing for Christ with their possessions.

To keep our vows of love vital there is a separation that must be refused.

VI. TO KEEP OUR VOWS VITAL — THERE IS A LOVE THAT MUST BE RENEWED

1. Renew the love in order to recall the bliss of the past. Any marriage is strengthened by remembering and recalling the unbelievable joy of the hour of marriage. The recreating of this hour in the mind helps to keep love fresh. When the wedding hour is remembered, it becomes clear "that the wedding ritual does not meander through ceremonial odds and ends." (p. xii, George E. Sweazey, *In Holy Marriage*) It has a plot and purpose. The high mood of the majestic moments of the past must be recalled in order that we can be sustained in the lower moods.

Our relationship with Christ should be such that we daily recall and renew our love to Christ. It is possible that we forget the wonderful joy that was in our lives when we were saved. The recalling of the salvation hour makes us aware that there was a time when we did not ask, "Do I have to give?"

but we asked, "Why not give more?" Do you remember? We must never get over the thrill of trusting Jesus.

A. J. Cronin's book, The Citadel tells of a person who forgot. The story weaves around a medical doctor who started out his career with fine enthusiasm for his profession. He was sensitive to human needs. He was eager to be of service anywhere. Hamilton says, "He lived under the spell of a dream. Then something happened. The doctor was caught in the undertow and had a chance to make easy money. Little by little his ideals faded. Gradually he turned his back on the fine spirit that once motivated him. He grew cynical and traded his dreams for babbles. His young wife, seeing the fineness in him die, reminded him of his ideals. She said, "Don't vou remember how vou used to talk about life as an attack upon the unknown, an assault uphill, as though you had a castle up there you could see but could not reach?" He laughed a hollow laugh. "I was young then, and foolish. That was romantic talk." (p. 84, J. Wallace Hamilton, The Thunder of Bare Feet)

We must be without shame in recalling the romantic talk in our Christian lives. We must remember the flaming enthusiasm that was once ours. To keep our vows vital the freshness of a first love toward Jesus must be renewed.

2. Renew the love in order to press forward in a growing faith.

When the vows of love said at a marriage altar are renewed, there is a sense in which the faith and love toward the marriage partner grow stronger. When this renewal is done, it is again realized that "marriage is more than a physical arrangement . . . it

is a spiritual venture." (Guy Moore, *Beam*) Even as the sun is the center of the universe, Jesus Christ becomes the center of the home.

A news item carried the title, "Couple marries for 13th time — 37 More to Go." The story was concerning Mr. & Mrs. James D. Grady who planned to be married in each of the 50 states of the Union. Mr. Grady said, "This is our way of protesting against divorce. We think being married is one way of maintaining a healthy respect for wedlock." They were making their marriage marathon in a mobile home with the hope of being married 50 times by the end of the year.

Although we might question the method of the Gradys, there is no question about their motives. There is a need of renewal.

In our relationship with Christ there must be a day by day renewal. As the love in our heart toward Christ is renewed, the result will be a revival of a growing faith. Spiritual growth waits on such a renewal. Spiritual enrichment waits on such a renewal. Happy marriages wait on such a renewal.

Conclusion:

An old Vermonter sat one day on the porch of the farmhouse whittling, while his wife sat beside him rocking and knitting. After a long silence he said to her, "You know, Sarah, you have meant so much to me that sometimes it's almost mor'n I can stand not to tell you about it."

Why don't we? In order that the vows of love might be vital in this hour may we not only rethink but also repeat our vows of love.

May we stand and bow our heads in prayer. While

our heads are bowed in prayer, the husband and wives will clasp hands. In this sacred moment may we listen to the marriage vows:

In taking the one whom you hold by the hand to be your lawful and wedded wife, I require you to promise to love and cherish her, to honor and sustain her, in sickness as in health, in poverty as in wealth, in the bad that may darken your days, in the good that may light your ways, and to be true to your companion in all things until death alone shall part you.

Do you so promise? May the promise be such that you rededicate yourself to this vow.

Now with our heads still bowed in prayer, may we clasp hands with none other than the nail-pierced hand of Jesus. In this most sacred moment may we listen to the vow of love to Christ:

In taking Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, I require you to promise to love and crown Him, to honor and hold Him, in your sickness as in your health, in your poverty as in your wealth, in the bad that may darken your days, in the good that may light your ways, and to be true to Jesus as a faithful steward in all things until death alone shall part you.

Do you so promise? May the promise be such that you rededicate yourself to this vow.

In one of the darkest hours of World War II, Winston Churchill said of England, "This is England's finest hour!"

One of the finest hours of any family is when they witness to their faith through stewardship and keep the vows vital.

CHAPTER IV.

A CHRISTIAN AND HIS SPENDING

Scripture Text — Luke 12:13-21

The purpose of this message is to show that the Bible suggests a theology of spending, whereby the Christian's use of his possessions becomes a means of witness.

- Russell H. Dilday, Jr.

Theme — "A Christian Family Witnessing to its Faith Through Stewardship."

Scheduled for Monday night (following Sunday II)

This Monday night service is a combination moneymanagement clinic and a worship service. Helpful materials as recommended in the order of service may be ordered from SBC Stewardship Services, 127 Ninth Avenue, North, Nashville, Tennessee.

The "pack the pew" plan is suggested for an attendance promotion for the meeting. Few services hold greater potential for helping families than this one.

ORDER OF SERVICE

(Suggestion)

Money Management Clinic — (allow 45 minutes to one hour)

Where possible, prepare separate clinics for youth, young adults, middle-age adults, and older adults.

"Planning the Family Witness" is a twelve page guidebook for use by a family in evaluating and planning their money use. It will assist a family in developing better spending habits and will encourage them in tithing.

Song Service

Filmstrip — "The Money Trap"

Special Music

Sermon — "A Christian and His Spending"

Dismiss

Fellowship Time (light refreshments)

A CHRISTIAN AND HIS SPENDING

Text — Luke 12:13-21

A typical household scene characteristic of these "indebted sixties" shows a harried husband on the last day of the month shuffling a stack of bills due. The pink-colored invoices indicating a third notice are grouped at the top of the stack and the bills recently received are put at the bottom. Then by means of simple addition it is determined how far into the stack of bills the bill-payer can go and still keep a comfortable balance at the bank. One cartoonist pictures such a harried husband saying to his wife, "Well, we're at that bridge we said we would cross when we came to it." (Signature, August, 1966 p. 58)

The Bible is no stranger to such a scene. It tells about people who cannot pay their debts or who have failed to manage their money wisely. One woman is described as being in trouble because she spent all her income and savings on medical bills. (Luke 8:43-44) A young man is pictured as bankrupt because he squandered an inheritance in "riotious living." (Luke 15:11-32) The Bible talks about men who dabbled in real estate, precious jewels, savings and loan ventures. It speaks of interest rates, late-payment penalties, taxes, wages and inheritances. In one place it wisely advises us to beware of spending money for that which is not bread. (Isa. 55:2) These scriptural references along with others furnish the basic concepts of a biblical theology of spending, and if he will follow these guidelines, the twentieth century Christian can make his plan of spending a means of witness as well as a channel of blessing and joy to others.

Our materialistic and prosperous generation needs to apply this biblical theology of possessions. The American dollar sign originated from the old Spanish coins called "pieces-of-eight". The "S-like" figure is really an adjusted numeral eight, and the two vertical lines represent the

famous Pillars of Hercules. These were the huge rocks on either side of the Gibraltar Straits at the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea which Hercules was supposed to have erected when he sailed out to capture the oxen of Geryon. In 1000 B.C. Phoenecian mariners built silver columns on these rocks and inscribed them with the Latin phrase "ne plus ultra" meaning "no more beyond." It indicated that these ancient sailors believed that the Gibraltar Straits were the outward limits of safe navigation. (World Book Encyclopedia, Vol. VIII p. 3156) To them, there was nothing else beyond the pillars. They were unaware that the broad expanse of the Atlantic with its beautiful undiscovered worlds was out there.

There are many today to whom the columns of Hercules on the dollar sign still speak that same motto, "no more beyond". Money is to them life's ultimate value, the outer limit of life's horizon. To them there is nothing else of any value beyond the dollar.

There were people afflicted by this same materialistic misconception in Jesus' day too. We meet two of them in the twelfth chapter of Luke. Two brothers were bickering over the division of an inheritance. Since it was common in those days for disputes of this nature to be brought to a Rabbi for arbitration, these two came to Jesus. Jesus however, refused to be drawn into their family dispute; but instead he used their controversy as a spring-board from which to teach his disciples the danger of a false conception about money. Here in the parable of the rich land-owner is found a lesson concerning the Christian and his spending.

The parable reveals that Jesus considered material possessions morally neutral. Riches could be used either to relieve the needs of unfortunate people and thus bring glory to God; or they could be wasted selfishly and thus dishonor God. Therefore, the possession of material things brings with it a responsibility for wise spending.

The parable is also a warning that the perils of prosperity are much more subtle and dangerous than the perils of poverty. Success has a way of bandaging one's eyes and warping one's views so quietly and skillfully that it is hardly noticed. The wealthy, successful person may be, therefore, more susceptible to temptation and sin. While Lincoln was great in spite of his poverty, it is even more impressive that Gladstone was great in spite of his prosperity and wealth. Jesus is suggesting then that those who have been blessed with prosperity and materialistic wealth need to beware of some attendant dangers. It is almost as though Jesus were saying to the Christian, "Be careful of certain dreadful diseases that can be easily contracted in an environment of prosperity. Plan your money management and your family spending in such a way as to avoid these diseases." One might even coin some medical terminology to describe three of these perils pointed to in the parable. First, a Christian must use his possessions in such a manner as to avoid contracting an:

I. INSATIABLE FINANCIAL ADDICTION

A person can habituate himself to the use of a barbituate or drug and become addicted. He develops an insatiable appetite for more and more. Here Jesus is describing a man who because of his prosperity has habituated himself to gaining more and more wealth until he becomes literally a financial addict.

The word translated "coveteousness" which Jesus uses here (v. 15) is the word "pleonexia". It literally means "a greedy desire to have more." (Arndt and Gingrich Greek Lexicon p. 673) The Bible always ranks covetousness with the gravest sins of man. In Romans 12 it is linked with fornication and murder. In I Corinthians 5 it stands beside extortion. In Ephesians 4 covetousness is compared to lasciviousness and uncleaness. In Colossians 3 it is called idolatry.

This wealthy and prosperous land-owner in the parable

is described as having a severe case of covetousness. The word "my" appears six times, the word "I" six times, and the words "myself" and "my soul" also are used. A young boy was asked what part of speech these possessive pronouns were and he said, "They are aggressive pronouns." This man was aggressively selfish. He possessed an insatiable desire for more and more — larger barns, greater profits, increased goods, expanded investments. His plan of spending centered completely and entirely about himself.

It was said of one woman "Edith lived in a little world bounded on the North, South, East and West by Edith. (Barclay, Gospel of Luke p. 168) "This man's whole world was within himself and money had become his God, his life, his reason for existence, his future, his hope and his security.

The tip-off of his financial addiction comes when he says to himself, "What shall I do?". Here is the test. He could have shared his superfluous crops with others less fortunate than he. Like Ambrose he could have understood that "the barns for superfluity are the bosoms of the needy, the houses of the widow, the mouths of orphans and children." (Lockyer, All The Parables Of The Bible, P. 269) He could have said, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me." But the man has lost control. He is no longer master of himself. He is addicted to his insatiable greed; and he says instead, "I'll build myself bigger barns, I'll squander what is mine on myself, I will eat, drink and be merry."

This same addiction has been contracted by many in our prosperous twentieth century. There are times when it is easy to be caught in the undertow of a materialistic environment. Just as the undertow in the surf at the beach can pull a man farther out to sea no matter how hard he may swim; so the undertow of prosperity can pick up a man and drag him along that vicious cycle of raises and indebtedness, new cars and houses, status

symbols, keeping up with the Joneses, emergencies and excuses. If he is not careful he soon looses all control and becomes addicted to bigger barns, crops and investments.

The Bible warns us that the love of money is the root of all evil. It warns of the deceitfulness of riches. It indicates that gold and silver can be a canker and that the folly of materialism ends in vanity of vanities. Jesus here is suggesting that a family must plan the use of its money in such a way as to avoid the peril of financial addiction.

In the second place, a Christian must see his possessions in such a manner as to avoid contracting:

II. SEVERE SPIRITUAL SCLEROSIS

Arteriosclerosis is a medical term describing a hardening of the arteries and thereby a restriction of the flow of life-giving blood through the body. The man in Jesus' parable had contracted "spiritual sclerosis." His spiritual awareness had hardened and contracted to the extent that God was completely squeezed out of his life.

Notice this man was not dishonest. He had not acquired his riches through fraudulent schemes. He was apparently guilty of no grave misconduct. He was just so busy and so involved in his financial advancement that he had no time for God. His schedule was so full it crowded religion right out of his life. He had to work night and day, even on Sundays, to maintain his level of success; and as he became opulent and rich, God became increasingly unnecessary and unimportant. Finally his spiritual life, which should have been an open channel to God, shrank and shriveled to nothing.

Probably the man would not have called himself an atheist, but he lived like one. He did not honor God; he did not acknowledge his Sovereignty; he did not trust him for the present nor the future. He spoke only of my crops, my ground, my barns, my goods and completely forgot that behind it all was the giver of every good and perfect gift. He even spoke of my soul, forgetting that

God had said in Ezekiel, "all souls are mine," (Ezek. 18:4) and in Daniel, "man's breath is in my hands." (Dan. 5:23)

Psalms 14:1 says "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God". A more literal translation would be, "the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God for me." (Lockyer, All The Parables Of The Bible, p. 267) So this man is designated as a fool because he allowed his spiritual life to dwindle down to nothing restricting the presence of God in his plans. He is a living example of the warning of Jesus that man cannot serve God and money.

Following her early retirement Jenny Lind was found by a friend one day seated by the seashore with a Bible in her lap. When the friend asked her why she had retired from the stage so early she responded by saying, "Every stage I crossed and every roar of applause I heard made me think less of that, (and she pointed to the sunset) and never of this" (she pointed to the Bible). It is possible for a person to use his money in such a way as to turn his attention and interest and values away from God toward material things.

The Bible warns us in Psalms 49:6, 13-14

"They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; This their way is their folly . . . Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling."

It warns us not to let our business, our vocation, our possessions squeeze God out. We are rather to be rich toward God, to let the way we spend our money reflect a spiritual sense of values. We are to beware of the peril of prosperity that is called spiritual sclerosis. In the third place, a Christian is to use his possessions in such a manner as to avoid contracting:

III. CHRONIC TEMPORAL HYPEROPIA

Hyperopia is the medical term for far-sightedness. When it came to measuring time the man in the parable was critically far-sighted. All his plans called for a long lifetime of enjoyment and pleasure. He could see far down through the months ahead and dream about all he would do with his money. (vs. 19) His far-sightedness kept him from seeing the urgency of the present, the crisis of the immediate moment. All his calendars said "Many years, many years," but God's calendars all said "This night, this night."

The most dramatic phrase in the entire story is "but God." (vs. 20) His barns were full — but God. His future looked bright — but God. His security seemed inevitable — but God. We are a nation of people with temporal hyperopia today. So often the way we spend our money indicates that our vision of the future blinds us to the possibility that at any moment we might be brought face to face with God. Jesus is saying in the parable that a Christian should spend his money and invest it wisely. He should do so in the consciousness that at any moment he might be confronted by the necessity to answer for his pattern of living.

An old man asked a young boy about his plans for the future. The boy responded "I will learn my trade first." The man asked, "What then?" "I will set up my business," answered the boy; "and what then?" said the man. "I will make my fortune." "What then?" "I will grow old and retire and live on the money I have accumulated." "What then?" "I suppose," said the young boy, "I will die." "And what then," was the last question the old man asked. (Barclay, Gospel Of Luke, p. 168) That last stabbing question is the one that hurts — "what then?" The man in Jesus' parable had forgotten there was another world and that he was as close to eternity as his next breath.

Few in our materialistic age seem to be anxious or concerned about eternity any more. We have learned through experience to shake off warnings of nuclear war-fare and wholesale destruction, and it has become easy for us to shake off fears and concerns about eternity too. Our eyes are apparently far down the road planning the next move, the next investment, the next spree. This parable is a warning that at any moment God might come to say, "This night thy soul will be required of thee"

How would we stand with God today if he should say to us, "This very night, thy soul is required of thee." This is probably the most important question facing us today. Even in the mundane tasks of planning a family budget, paying the bills, purchasing a new car and other family needs, there is a solemn obligation of Christian responsibility. One should spend his money in such a way as to avoid the dread diseases of financial addiction, spiritual sclerosis and temporal hyperopia. A Christian must avoid being caught in the undertow of a prosperous society, the vicious cycle of gaining more and more. He must learn to use his money unselfishly and carefully in order to reverse the trends of dangerous materialistic misconceptions. He must, as Jesus said in the parable, learn to be rich toward God, addicted completely to the doing of His will. He must use his common sense in stewardship planning to open up the restricted channels of spiritual power in order to allow God's presence to flow through his life. And he must constantly keep his eyes focused to see not only this world but the other world. He must make his plans not only for the months ahead, but also for the immediate possibility of confronting God face to face. Jesus said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." (vs. 15)

CHAPTER V

FAMILIES FOUND FAITHFUL

Scripture Text — Deuteronomy 12:5-19

Christian families should be "found faithful" with respect to:

- 1. The elements of worship (giving)
- 2. The participants in worship
- 3. The spirit of worship

- Dan G. Kent

Theme — "A Christian Family Witnessing to its Faith Through Stewardship."

Scheduled for Tuesday (following Sunday II) — See

calendar in 1967 Guidebook — "A Christian Witnessing to its Faith Through Stewardship."

This is the night for the All Church Fellowship. Where possible, this fellowship should be held in a meeting place large enough for the meal to be served at tables. Arrange tables so that those whose wedding anniversaries are in January will sit together. Follow the same plan for each of the other eleven months. The decoration theme should be based on a combination of the wedding anniversary and the season (months) of the year — (for example, December weddings.)

ORDER OF SERVICE

(Suggestion)

(Master of ceremonies should be someone other than speaker.)

Prayer of Gratitude

Meal

Group singing and entertainment — use ideas of home, wedding anniversaries)

Welcome (recognitions and announcements — families and wedding anniversaries)

Filmstrip — "Where Stewardship Begins"

Leads viewer to seek complete harmony in his life through full service to Christ. He is led to see that his life stewardship commitment is inseparably related to his salvation experience.

Message — "Families Found Faithful"

Prayer of Dedication

FAMILIES FOUND FAITHFUL

Text — Deuteronomy 12:5-19

V. S. Azariah, the late Christian leader of India, says that "the low ratio of giving is a symptom of a low level of Christian life. The sooner we recognize this the better!" (Christian Giving).

This is our problem. It is a spiritual problem. The root cause of our stewardship failure is a failure of faithfulness. It is a failure of devotion. It is a failure to let the grace of God grow and shine in our lives.

Paul knew this to be true. He wrote to the believers at Corinth about their many problems. One of these problems was stewardship. He told them what he would tell our churches today. He told them what he would tell individual Christians today. He told them what he would tell our Christian families tonight. The heart of stewardship is faithfulness. "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (I Corinthians 4:2 KJV). What this church needs and what the Lord wants with regard to stewardship is families who will be found faithful.

I

Churches and church leaders are continually re-examining their approach to worship. We are continually asking ourselves what should be a part of our worship. What are the proper elements of worship? According to this passage from the heart of God's commands to his people, we find that one of the most significant elements of worship is giving. Donald F. Ackland puts it this way: "Sacrifice occupied an important place in of God's people. No subject of an earthly ruler would have entered the royal presence without a gift" (Studies in Deuteronomy, p. 70). Should one ever consider coming before God without giving? Not according to this passage of scripture.

This entire passage talks about giving. At least seven different gifts are listed here, including burnt offerings, sacrifices, free-will offerings, and the tithe. The tithe itself is considered in a five-fold way in verse 17. Of special note is the fact that this passage talks about the firstlings of herds and flocks, and the first fruits of the other produce. All of this is the principle of Proverbs 3:9: "Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce" (RSV). Do we give to God first? Is what we give an honor to him?

The people of Israel belonged to God. The land on which they lived belonged to God. As an admission of this fact — as a token of it — they were commanded in Leviticus 27:30-32 to bring the tithe. If American families gave only that much (present average gifts: $2\frac{1}{2}\%$) we could put missionaries in every corner of the world. No pioneer church would be cramped by inadequate facilities. No Christian school would need support. No child or senior citizen would suffer from lack of care. No church would have to restrict its program of outreach and ministry. All of these dreams would come true, if our people would do only this much.

We are talking about worship, but as God said through Moses, a large part of worship is giving. Psalm 96:8 says it, too: "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts" (RSV). As Dr. J. D. Grey of the First Baptist Church of New Orleans says, "The giving of money is a part of worship."

In January, 1954, Dr. William Kaufman told the American Psychiatric Association (in Boston, reported in TIME Magazine) that the commonest and most neglected illness in the United States today is moneysickness. If an individual's attitude toward money is not healthy, said Dr. Kaufman, it may touch off such psychosomatic illness as headaches, anxiety, hysteria, paralysis, panic reactions, depression, and disorders of the digestive

system, heart, lungs, and muscles. These conclusions by this Bridgeport, Connecticut, phychosomaticist came as a result of studies of more than a thousand of his patients.

Does the Bible have an answer to this problem of materialism? Yes, it does. That answer is faithful Christian stewardship. "The Christian is in a constant battle with covetousness, ingratitude, immaturity and secularism. The practice of tithing through his church can help him to combat these formidable foes" (W. E. Grindstaff, pp. 13-14, *The Baptist Program*, October, 1965).

This is why, in part, that worship is giving. No, all of worship is not the giving to the Lord of our material goods. However, worship is giving of ourselves in song, in prayer, and in sincere devotion. Worship is also giving of ourselves through the giving of our material goods. That tithe and our offerings beyond it represent us. Our gifts represent our time, talents, and energies, and the work which the Lord has enabled us to do (See verse 7b, Moffatt). "Our money is life crystallized, service transmuted into currency, talents and efforts made negotiable. Money used is life extended" (William Ward Ayer, "Jesus Sits by the Treasury").

This is why money and stewardship are mentioned in the Bible more than any other subject except faith (Hugh Pyle). The firstborn of the flocks and herds represent all of the flocks and herds (Dr. Forrest C. Feezor). As E. Stanley Jones says in his book of daily devotions, Abundant Living, (p. 301), "The tithe is a token — a token that you are not owner, but ower." It is our confession of God "as the source and owner of our material resources and incomes, of which we are the stewards and users" (Norman W. Cox, Tennessee). It is "one way of recognizing God's absolute ownership of all" (Dr. George C. Humphrey, Baylor University). Yes, as the Lord told Moses and through Moses the children of Israel, giving is an essential element at the heart of worship.

Who ought to give? This passage of scripture has already shown us that giving is a vital part of worship. In fact, in the light of this text, it is the heart of worship. But who should do the giving? The word of the Lord, through Moses, in Deuteronomy 12 is that all of the members of the *family* should participate in the worship of giving.

This section of Deuteronomy is evidently addressed to fathers. These commands are given to heads of households (see context, Deuteronomy 11:19-21). In this light, Deuteronomy 12:7 speaks of "you and your household." Verse 12 includes "you and your sons and your daughters." Even the servants are included: "your menservants and your maidservants." In other words, stewardship is a family affair.

This is not a new idea. It is merely what the rest of the Bible bears out. The nation of Israel was always considered a community. It is appropriate to speak of "the family of Israel." The Bible repeatedly mentions "the house of Israel." Consequently, when such passages as Numbers 18:24 talk of "the tithe of the people of Israel," the family idea is there. Psalm 96:7-8 calls on the "families of the peoples" to ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!"

Malachi, one of the later prophets, emphasizes two major ideas: social issues such as family life and worship as expressed in giving. It is important that the "preacher of righteousness" who says most about divorce and the need for strong homes also says most about robbing God and bringing in the tithe.

The same thing is true in the New Testament. Giving is on a family basis. Stewardship is a family responsibility. We see this from the time Mary and Joseph took their offerings to the temple when Jesus was a few days and

later twelve years old. When Jesus sat by the treasury it was a widow, the head of a household, who gave all that she had. Even the most perverted stewardship spirit in the Bible involves a man and his wife, Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.

Dr. T. A. Patterson said in a recent *Baptist Standard* article, "Tithing is a family privilege and duty." This Biblical emphasis is so strong that it can almost be said that "Individuals don't tithe; families do."

Ш

Where do we fail most consistently with regard to our stewardship? It is probably at the points which are spelled out in this passage, especially at the point of spirit. We give, but we do it grudgingly and of necessity. We do it as if we have been coerced, forced into it. We forget what these verses say. Our stewardship should be both joyous and generous.

1

A primary characteristic of the religious observances of the Old Testament was joy. Almost every religious observance was a holiday. It was a feast (Interpreter's Bible — communion meal or sacrificial feast). It was a festival. Verse seven of Deuteronomy 12 talks of eating before the Lord. Each feast was a happy time of family and community fellowship, much like the time which we are enjoying here tonight (see Ackland, Studies in Deuteronomy, p. 71).

C. S. Lewis reminds us that "mirth" is a good Old Testament word (*Reflections on the Psalm*, pp. 44-45, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958). Even the temple sacrifices struck a festive as well as a sacred note. (Verse 12 of this chapter is even more specific. It tells us to rejoice before the Lord. The context is giving, but the giving is to be done with joy.) We are not to be like the man who was told to "give till it

hurts" and responded, "It hurts me just to think about it." The Book of God tells us, rather, that we are to rejoice. We are to give till it feels good.

Lest we miss the point, verse 18 says it all over again. We are to eat together before the Lord our God and rejoice before the Lord our God in all that we undertake (see also Deuteronomy 14:26; 16:11; 15; 26:11). Mrs. Jim Hogue of Sundown asks this: "Did you ever see a forlorn tither?" We are not to be like the man described in the old poem:

Once I knew a Baptist, He had a pious look,

He had been totally immersed Except his pocketbook.

He put a nickel in the plate, And then with might and main,

He'd sing, "When we asunder part, It gives an inward pain!"

A certain widow of limited means took in washing to make her living. When her church conducted its annual stewardship emphasis, she covenanted to tithe. Two well-meaning friends who felt that she could not afford to do it called on her. When they told her, lovingly, that they thought she was giving too much, she burst into tears. She sobbed, "Let me alone. You are trying to take away the greatest pleasure of my life" (Howard P. Colson, Adult Stewardship Lesson, 1956). The spirit of worship—the spirit of tithing—is joy. "Worship, giving, and happiness go hand in hand" (Ackland, p. 72).

2

There is at least one other attitude which should be ours as we give. It is the spirit of all true worship. It is the spirit of all true giving. It is the priceless grace of *generosity*.

In all of this scripture there is not a trace of conservatism. There is not a trace of miserliness. There is no hint of selfish hoarding. Rather, through it all is the pervading perfume of liberality.

Verse 12 says that in our giving we should think of others. We should consider not just ourselves, our own well-being, and the needs of our own family. We should also remember those less fortunate, those whom our gifts will support. Verses 12, 18-19 mention the Levite who had no portion of his own. He had no inheritance or other means of support. (See Deuteronomy 14:27-29; 26:12).

Deuteronomy 27:12 adds to the list of our concern the sojourner, the stranger. Our concern is also to take in the fatherless and the widow, since they have no one on whom to depend. According to the Old Testament, they are objects of the special care of God. They are to have their proper place in our generosity, too.

In New Testament days the Macedonian Christians are our best examples of generous sacrifice. Self-denial and liberality were their distinguishing marks. As Paul describes those people in II Corinthians 8, they were persecuted. They had suffered from successive civil wars. Every year had been a bad year for them. They lived in "down-to-the-depth poverty" (Interpreter's Bible).

This tribulation brought out the best in them. You might suppose that they were unable to give. Rather, they gave beyond what Paul expected of them. One translation says that they were lavishly open-handed (New English Bible). They gave to the limit of their ability. In fact, they gave more than they were really able to give. But that is Christian giving: going to the very limit of ability, and then going beyond it.

This is in the best tradition of the Old Testament. Bishop V. S. Azariah estimates that the average Israelite set aside up to thirty per cent of his income for Jehovah (Christian Giving).

Robert S. Denny, now a vice president of the Baptist World Alliance, once said this of certain missionaries who had suffered in Communist countries: "It is wonderful that people will give their last drop of blood for what they believe." The late Dr. M. Theron Rankin, then secretary of the Foreign Mission Board, replied: "This is not so difficult (to understand). The most difficult thing is to get the indifferent people of America to give their first drop of blood in service."

Does our spirit of worship, our spirit of sacrificial generosity, match the spirit of the scripture? Does our spirit of giving match the spirit of those faithful ones our gifts support?

The Biblical spirit of stewardship is the spirit of faith-fulness described for us by Missionary C. F. Eaglesfield, Gold Coast, West Africa. An old father past eighty entered the church with his daughter. He hobbled up to the offering table, laid a few cents on it, and said, "That is my tithe." The leader said, "Uncle John, you have been sick for three weeks. You have not been able to work and earn money. How can you tithe?" The old man answered, "The Lord has been good to me. I am getting well. I thought I would come and pay him some in advance."

CHAPTER VI

A CHRISTIAN'S TESTIMONY IN GIVING

Scripture texts — Genesis 1:27
Romans 14:12
I Corinthians 4:2

The Christian family witnessing to its faith through stewardship is a portrait of life on the highest plain and in its noblest form.

-- Ed Brooks Bowles

Theme — "A Christian Family Witnessing to its Faith Through Stewardship."

Scheduled for Sunday III (see calendar in 1967 Guidebook — "A Christian Witnessing to its Faith Through Stewardship.")

This sermon is designed for use on dedication day which is called "A Day of Family Witness." On this day each church member is asked to bring his covenant card. When submitting this card he renews his personal commitment to serve Christ effectively. Encourage families to sit together so that they may move as a family to make their family-witness covenant. At the close of the pastor's message instruct members (by families) to move by the altar and turn in their convenant cards.

ORDER OF SERVICE

(Suggestion)

ORGAN PRELUDE

SOUNDING OF CHIMES

The congregation will please stand at the sounding of chimes CALL TO WORSHIP: "Doxology" Old 100th

MORNING PRAYER & CHORAL RESPONSE

HYMN NO. 14, "Praise to God, Immortal Praise" Dix

HYMN NO. 313, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing"

Nettleton

Kenosis

GREETING OF GUESTS AND KINGDOM BUSINESS

HYMN NO. 380, "The Church's One Foundation Aurelia

READING FROM GOD'S WORD I Corinthians, 13th Chapter

Pastor and People

PASTORAL PRAYER

OFFERTORY

TESTIMONY: "Why I Tithe"

SELECTED MUSIC: "I Live Thy Kingdom ,Lord" St. Thomas Arranged Thomas Macdougall

MESSAGE: "A Christian's Testimony in Giving" Pastor

HYMN OF DECISION NO. 357.

"Take My Life, and let it Be" Hendon DEDICATION MARCH Congregation

Choir: "I Gave My Life for Thee"

1st Stanza, Full Choir 2nd Stanza, Baritone solo 3rd Stanza, Soprano, Alto, Tenor sections

4th Stanza, Full Choir

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

CHORAL BENEDICTION: "More Love to Thee, O Christ"

More Love to Thee

ORGAN POSTLUDE

A CHRISTIAN'S TESTIMONY IN GIVING

TEXT: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." Genesis 1:27

"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." Romans 14:12

"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" I Cor. 4:2

Today, Commitment Day, has been anticipated by our church family for weeks. For some time now, the pastor, church leadership, teachers and officers and people in all of our organizations have used the words giving, tithing, offering, budget and stewardship in sermons, lessons, discussions, questions and answers. All of it means that our people have been thinking about their stewardship commitment to Christ for this year. This hour should be the fitting climax to our churchwide stewardship emphasis. I trust that you have given sincere study and prayer to the matter of the moment, that is, your stewardship covenant with God for 1968. I am certain that most of you have already decided what your commitment will be. But I ask, are you certain that God is pleased? Or, perhaps you are yet undecided as to your commitment? Is it possible that your indecision is due to an inner awareness that your proposed commitment falls short of divine expectation? I hope this message will offer you further insight into the meaning of Christian stewardship and encouragement to step forth from the ranks of the hesitant and join the hosts who have found great joy in being "found faithful".

Our theme for this year's stewardship emphasis has been *The Christian Family Witnessing to its Faith through Stewardship*, and this is the subject for our consideration this morning.

The Christian family, which is God's first institution

upon the earth, is the showcase of His infinite genius, and the divine display of His love in three dimensions: God's love for His creation — man, man's return of that love to the Creator, and man's love for His fellow man. The christian home is of divine origin and is the nearest thing to heaven we can know upon the earth. A christian home is "the resort of love, of joy, of peace and plenty, where supporting and supported, tried friends, and dear relations mingle into bliss."

Is there to be found a more conducive climate for us to witness to our faith through stewardship than

I. AT THE HEARTH . . .

where the fondest memories of life are forged and consecration in the deepest, richest, purest form is cast. In such a setting we may find:

- A. Christian Stewardship Defined
 - "What is meant by a steward?
 A steward is one who handles the property or affairs of another (Luke 16:1)
 - What is meant by Bible stewardship?
 Bible stewardship means the acknowledgement of God's ownership, the acceptance of our trusteeship, and the administration of the same according to the will of God (I Cor. 4:1, 2; I Timothy 6:20)". (Dillard, J. E. Good Stewards, Broadman Press, 1953, pg. 127)
- B. God's Proprietorship Accepted the elementary principles of Stewardship?
 - 1. God is the creator, owner, and giver of all things (Gen. 1:1)
 - 2. All we are and have we have received as a trust (I Cor. 4:7); (Jas. 1:17).

- 3. We must acknowledge our stewardship by devoting a portion to the Lord's work (Lev. 27:30,32).
- We must render a final account (Rom. 14:12)
 (Dillard, J. E. Good Stewards, Broadman Press, pg. 127)

C. The Stewardship of Life and Self Applied

1. Committed Life

The Lordship of Jesus should be apparent in the family circle. The spiritual climate of our homes should offer daily testimony to our belief in the authority of God's word that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord. The thoughts and actions of the individual should be such as to draw the family into a deeper dedication to Him as Lord of all.

"Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord to thee."

The Philippian jailer's concern for his family following his conversion is a proof of his conversion and a demonstration of a christian parent's concern for the wellbeing of his family (Acts 16:30-34).

Ruth's vow of dedication to her home should stir every parent's heart, and deepen the christian's commitment to Christ (Ruth 1:16).

And, of course, Christ's utterance of love and concern for his mother while suffering upon Calvary exemplifies the noblest love of child for parent (John 19:26, 27).

Joshua speaks for every "family of the faith" when he announced, "Choose you this day whom you will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)

The family's commitment to Christ is the result of the parents and children fashioning their lives after the unique life of the Perfect One.

2. Cultivated Character

C haracter is one of the great motivating powers in the world. It exemplifies human nature in its highest form, for it exhibits man at his best.

Character is of slow but steady growth. The influences which operate in the formation of it are numerous and, however trivial, are not to be neglected. Those forces which contribute most to the making of christian character operate silently and imperceptibly.

It has been said that God gives the mind, but man makes the character. Other ways to express this idea are: mind is the garden; character is the fruit and mind is the page; character is the writing man puts on it.

There is no greater influence in the shaping of the individual's character than that of his family. It might better be called effluence, for the philosophy of the home is constantly radiating from those who compose it and most of all, when one is least conscious of the emanations.

The perceptive words of Daniel Webster convey precisely what I mean. "If we work upon marble, it will perish; if we work upon brass, time will efface it; if we rear temples, they will crumble into dust. But if we work upon immortal minds, if we imbue them with high principles, with the just fear of God and love of their fellowmen, we engrave on those tablets something which no time can efface, but will brighten all eternity."

Thus, the domestic fireside is a seminary of infinite

importance. It is important because the education it bestows gives color to the whole texture of life.

¹Gamble, W. B., Benedicte's Scrapbook, Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1956

3. Continuing Charity

Charity or christian love is not only the magnet which draws personalities to each other; it is the cohesive force which holds them together.

Even though the tapestry of one's life is woven by the shuttle, i.e. man himself, the design of each life is determined by the weaver, God. Surely the most magnanimous manifestation of Divine Stewardship is the gift of life. Along with this gift of life, God bestows upon man a free moral will, which man may use at his own discretion. However, the prudent man will use this free will to discern in the laws of nature the true principles of life, to understand from the multiple instruction of the Bible, conscience, and reason itself that God has a pattern for every life, a pattern similar to the perfect design of creation suggested by these words, "Let us make man in our image." Regardless of the design which God may foreordain for each person's life, each individual, in order to weave a strong and enduring fabric, must incorporate Christian commitment, depth of character, and exercise of charity. Only by the total stewardship of self can one partake of the abundant life God would have each of us live.

The Christian family witnesses to its faith through Stewardship

II. UPON THE ALTAR

The two divine institutions in creation are the home and the church. One cannot fulfil its noble purpose without the other. This interdependence thus requires the christian family to enter into covenant with others who share their . . .

A. CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH

Jesus said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:13). Paul stated "Christ also loved the church" (Eph. 5:25), and called upon the christians in Rome to "salute the church" (Romans 16:5).

Baptists believe the church (ecclesia) is a company of baptized believers united in the performance of Christ's cause upon the earth. The church is the one institution whose primary concern is the souls of men — always striving to guide them into the best in this life and the next.

To a world racing down a blind alley, tortured by an old and unremitting despair, and plagued by the meaninglessness of existence, the church offers the promise of "abundant life," the guarantee of "the power of God unto Salvation," the assurance of "the faith that overcomes the world, through Him who loved us and died for us."

The church undergirds the family by representing and advocating those virtues in human life which indeed make the difference between a house and a home — goodness, faith, love, reverence, generosity and courage.

May I ask how many of us would live in this community if there were to be found no churches pointing people to the One who is "the Way," "the Truth" and "the Life"? I dare say that only a heartless handful would dare endure the heathen environment of such a pagan place. The righteous influence of Christ's "ecclesia" cannot be overestimated.

Though the foolish may ignore it and the godless deplore it, yet wise men will thank God for the Church, whose presence is a Gibraltar of good and Godliness in the place where they live.

B. COMMITMENT TO ITS COMMISSION

Christ's challenge to His church to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," (Matt. 28:19, 20) clearly states the purpose of every New Testament church. I think the following statement recommended by Southern Baptists for our "70 Onward Emphasis" reveals mature insight into the church's objectives and functions:

"The objective of a church, composed of individuals who share a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, is to be, through the power of the Holy Spirit, a redemptive body in Christ, growing through Christian maturity through worship, education, and ministry, proclaiming the gospel to the whole world, and applying Christian principles to man and society that God's purpose may be achieved."

The five functions of the church are . . .

To worship — a personal encounter with God in which the Christian experiences a deepening of his faith and a strengthening of his service. The scope of worship is the encountering of God in spirit and truth. This may be done in public or private.

To witness—the proclaiming of God's work of grace in Christ for all men. The scope of witnessing is the communication of the message of Christ which has as its central purpose the bringing of all men to profess Jesus as Lord and confess Him as Saviour.

To educate — the guiding of persons in their progressive development toward Christian maturity. The scope of education includes teaching, training, and personal involvement designed to help the church

and the individual's growth toward a mature christian faith in life.

To "apply"—the practical application of Christian principles in all the issues of everyday life. The scope includes bringing to bear Christian principles in family life, human relations, daily work, citizenship, and both private and public morality.

To minister — meeting crucial human needs in the spirit of Christ. The scope recognizes that a church must have concern for the whole man, physical as well as spiritual. This includes the service a church and its members perform for the estranged, the destitute, the deprived, and the suffering within its own membership, in its community, and in the world. The Christian Family's Stewardship witness is enhanced and extended through involvement in the church's mission. This means participating in its program, cooperating with its ministries, and supporting it with tithes and offerings.

George W. Truett once said, "I believe more profoundly in the church every hour that I live. A man can make his testimony go further through the church than through any independent movement. He can make his money go further, his testimony, and all his work go further. He can do more constructive work, than any other way in the world. I have watched all kinds of independent movements these forty-two years and my conviction steadily deepens that a Christian man is doing the wisest thing possible when he links his life with the church."

C. CONFIRMATION OF HIS COMMANDMENT

The covenant cards which we bring to the altar this morning represent the decision as to what we shall give to Him through our church in 1968. Will you note that I said give to Him through our church.

Do we give to a financial program? Never! Strictly speaking, the church does not have a financial program. It has a program which must be financed. This program was given by our Lord long ago. It is the same today as then: to win this whole world to Him. And a world program calls for a world of financing.

Do we give to the Church? Again, No! We do not give to the church We give THROUGH the church to Christ's cause. And we give through the church because it is the institution divinely established to promote the cause of Christ. But we give to the cause, not to the church.

Do we give to the Budget? Still, no! There is not direct connection between the budget of the church and one's giving. The budget is a published statement of the minimum needs of the church. However, the budget should not control a Christian's giving. Our giving should be a voluntary expression of our gratitude and devotion to our Lord. And it should be "as God hath prospered him," regardless of the amount of the budget of the church.

As you consider your personal stewardship program, remember that He said, and His Word is still valid: "The tithe is the Lord's." Also, He said, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse" . . . the present day local church.

Some people ask, "Since there are so many good causes, why should I give all my tithe to my church?" The following story gives a good answer.

The keeper of a lighthouse on a rugged coast was given a month's supply of fuel at a time. He was warned to make the supply last. One night a mother knocked at his door and pleaded for fuel to warm her only child. The keeper was moved and gave her

some. He did the same with other requests, all of which were genuine cases of hardship.

Toward the end of the month his fuel ran out. The last two or three nights his lighthouse was dark. A tragic shipwreck resulted, with a loss of a hundred lives. When a government official investigated, the keeper cited the many cases of need. "Yes," replied the official, "but remember you had one supreme responsibility: to keep the main light burning. There can be no excuse."

If we divide our tithes hither and yon, there will not be enough to keep the main lights burning in our churches, which is our first responsibility.

I have yet to meet a bonafide tither who was unhappy with God's plan of giving or dissatisfied with the results in his life. But there may be those who hesitate and then ask, "Do I have to tithe?" The answer is, "No, you do not have to be systematic and faithful in stewardship." You do not have to share in the Kingdom enterprises with your fellow-believers. You do not have to invest your money in the effort to win lost people to Christ. You do not have to participate in sending the gospel to distant lands."

No Christian is compelled by the letter of the law. But every Christian is constrained by the love of Christ who said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments," and again, "if you keep my commandments you will abide in my love." What one actually does for his Lord and His cause is determined by that condition, "if you love me." The person who truly loves Christ will ask, "How much can I do?" but he who is motivated by self-love will ask, "How much can I get by with?" What a person does with his money shapes his character. It has been said that accumulation makes the money; distribution makes

the man. Certainly he who gives most to God makes the most of his money and himself.

We frequently hear people talk as if tithing were difficult. As a matter of fact, the tithing of one's income to the Lord is a very easy matter. The reason that tithing is hard for some people is that they have the wrong motive in doing it.

I do not tithe because someone else tithes. I do not tithe because the church needs the money. I do not tithe because I fear the curse of God if I do not. I do not tithe in order that we may have a new church building and better equipment. I do not tithe because the Bible teaches it, although this is one reason I know that I should tithe. I tithe because I love my Lord and want to do His will.

When we tithe for any reason other than for the love of God, then tithing becomes legalistic and irksome. Naturally, we give the most to the objects of our love. I love my Lord supremely; therefore, I want to give Him the most. When once the love of God burns supremely in an enlightened heart, tithing ceases to be a legalistic task which is hard to fulfill, and it becomes a joy not to be denied. Thus my challenge to you would be to let the love of God dwell in your heart and try tithing the income to Him through the Church. Then you will find a joy closely akin to the joy of your salvation. In fact, the joy of salvation will be intensified.

I wonder why the Lord did ask, For tithes from you and me;

When all the treasures of the earth Are His . . . eternally?

But He said to bring our little, And He would add His much; Then all the heavenly windows Would be opened at His touch.

And blessings running over . . . Even more than has been told . . .

Will be ours; but there's no promise If His portion we withhold.

Are we afraid to prove HIM?

Is our faith and love so small

That we tightly grasp our little, When He freely gave His all?

Truly the Christian family witnessing to its faith through stewardship is a portrait of life on the highest plain and in its noblest form.

> Ed B. Bowles, Pastor Green Acres Baptist Church Tyler, Texas August 22, 1966

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